

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Virginia Department of Highways Building

other names/site number State Highway Commission Building (VDHR 127-0894)

2. Location

street & number 1401 E. Broad Street not for publication
city or town Richmond vicinity
state Virginia code VA county N/A code 127 Zip 23219

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally X statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the
National Register

 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

7. Description**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions)Stripped Classicism/WPA Modern

_____**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)foundation Granite
roof _____
walls Granite
Limestone
other _____
_____**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)**8. Statement of Significance****Applicable National Register Criteria** (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)_____

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

name of property
location

Period of Significance 1937-1939

Significant Dates 1937-1939

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Carneal, Johnston & Wright, architects
Virginia Engineering Co., contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.4

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
1 18 285231 4157146 2
3 4
☐ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

U. S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service

name of property
location

11. Form Prepared Byname/title: John E. Wells, Architectural HistorianOrganization: Virginia Department of Transportation, Richmond District date April 2003street & number: 2430 Pine Forest Drive telephone (804) 524-6269city or town Colonial Heights state VA zip code 23834**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of General Services, Division of Engineering and Buildingsstreet & number 805 E. Broad Street telephone (804) 786-3263city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23219

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Virginia Department of Highways Building
1401 E. Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia**

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7. Summary Description:

The Virginia Department of Highways Building is located on East Broad Street, where the Medical College of Virginia campus and other hospitals have flourished since the early 19th century, and where State Government buildings, especially the buildings of the Virginia Department of Transportation, have stood since the middle 20th century.

The Building is an imposing and literate expression of the “Stripped Classicism” mode, sometimes described as “starved classicism” or “WPA Modern.” According to Wilson et al., “Stripped Classicism was conservative Modernism. It respected the classical past and became the official government style in the 1930s, seen in numerous public buildings.” Other Virginia examples of the style include the State Library and Supreme Court Building, Richmond (1937-1939), the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, Norfolk (1934), the National Airport, Arlington County (completed in 1941), and the Pentagon, Arlington County (1941-1942).¹

The four-story building has 82,000 square feet of floor space. The building is of steel and reinforced concrete construction, with a veneer of limestone, Virginia greenstone, and pink granite. A colossal colonnade of eighteen pilasters defines the Broad Street elevation. The colonnade is not a precise rendition of any of the classical orders, but a literate hybrid of elements; the proportions closest to the Corinthian and Composite orders, while the entablature is composed of elements from the Ionic and Doric orders. The stylized capitals feature anthemion motifs flanked by volutes; the pilasters are nine and one-half diameters (width) tall, and the entablature another four diameters (width) high.

The four-foot-high frieze on the north elevation has the inscription “Dedicated to the Comfort and Safety of Those who Travel the Highways of the Commonwealth of Virginia.”² Two twelve-foot high bronze urns flank the main stairs; these urns were fitted with 500-watt floodlights. Two stone eagles perch on the entablature, flanking the attic story.

The main entrance lobby is thirteen feet high, with polished buff marble walls and four red travertine marble columns. Lobbies on the upper floors are of marble and terrazzo, and the general office flooring and corridors are of mastic tile. The original design included measures for summer and winter HVAC.

The building has both open-plan office space and double-loaded corridors. The basement and west portion of the first floor were occupied by testing laboratories. The division of planning survey and the hearing rooms, including a large room with a capacity of 200, occupied the remaining first-floor space. The second floor housed the division of location and planning. The third floor contained the divisions of purchasing, auditing, right of way, and maintenance, as well as the offices of the highway commissioner and the chief engineer. The fourth floor held the divisions of bridge engineering, claims, safety

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engineering, landscaping, and outdoor advertising. The building is still used as the main offices of the Virginia Department of Transportation, although the divisions have adjusted locations within the building, expanding also into the adjacent 1961 Annex and the rehabilitated Memorial Hospital.

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8. Statement of Significance

The Virginia Department of Highways Building (VDHR 127-0894) is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, as a significant manifestation of the State's expansive highway construction and maintenance mission; and under Criterion C, as a significant and elegant expression of the "Stripped Classicism" style that was in favor for government buildings in the 1930s and 1940s. The building is still in use for its original program, and it retains a high degree of integrity from its original construction.

Historical Background

The Virginia State Highway Commission was established in 1906, with responsibility for construction and maintenance of the state highway system.³ The General Assembly designated a network of 4,002 miles in 1918. The counties were generally responsible for lesser roadways. In 1932, the General Assembly passed the Byrd Road Act, establishing the state secondary road system and allowing the counties⁴ to transfer responsibility for secondary roads to the Virginia Department of Highways (the agency's name had changed in 1927). Thus, some 35,900 miles of mostly unsurfaced county roads became the new responsibility of VDH. The Department expanded accordingly, and in 1938 the Department had offices in the 7th and 8th floors, State Office Building (Washington Building); at 1204 E. Main Street; at 1108 E. Main Street, 12th floor; and at 1442 E. Main Street.

By 1938 the Virginia Department of Highways was the largest of state agencies in personnel (300) and in expenditures. Commissioner Henry G. Shirley reported in 1936 that the agency had "entirely too many employees per square foot of room for their welfare and to do the work of the State efficiently."⁵

A new building was planned for the 1200 block of East Broad Street.⁶ Architects for the building were Carneal, Johnston & Wright of Richmond.⁷ The general contractors were Virginia Engineering Company of Newport News. In 1940, Commissioner Shirley reported that:

Due to the necessity for more office space and to have the Highway local forces housed in one building, there was erected a main Highway Office Building, located on Broad Street between Twelfth and Fourteenth Streets, having a 228 foot frontage on Broad and a depth of 170 feet. The building was started in January 1939 and completed November 15, 1939. It has sufficient space to house the entire local force of the Department, thereby increasing its efficiency by having them all together in one building rather than scattered about the city at a number of points. The building was built in cooperation with the Public Works Administration who made a 45% free grant of its cost, for which the Highway Commission extends their sincere thanks; also for the complete cooperation of its local and other officials in approving all plans and expediting the

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construction, enabling the building to be occupied at an early date.⁸

The *Thirty-Third Report* described the P.W.A. Central Highway Office Building Grant as \$34,279.90.⁹ Other sources suggest that more money was also channeled through the P.W.A.

In 1940, the *Architectural Record* surveyed leading Richmond citizens, asking them to nominate outstanding examples of recent architecture in their city. The building receiving the most nominations (eighteen) was the State Highway Commission Building. (The second and third finishers in the poll were the State Library Building, with fourteen nominations, and the new Hospital at the Medical College of Virginia, with twelve nominations.)¹⁰

The building remains in service for its original purpose. It has been periodically upgraded, and it is connected by second-story pedestrian bridges to adjacent VDOT buildings, including the 1961 Annex Building and the rehabilitated Memorial Hospital.

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Bibliography

Carneal, Johnston & Wright, Architects & Engineers, Richmond, Virginia. Original blueprints for Central Highway Office Building, Richmond, Commission no. 950; November 1938. Copies on file at Virginia Department of Transportation, Administrative Services, 1201 E. Broad Street, Richmond, Virginia.

“The Department of Highways, History, Organization, and Functions.” *Virginia Highway Bulletin*, Vol. 8, No. 9, July 1942.

A History of Roads in Virginia, “the most convenient ways.” Virginia Department of Transportation Office of Public Affairs and Virginia Transportation Research Council, 1992.

Mullen, Claree Sutton. “Virginia’s Highways in Retrospect.” *The Commonwealth*. Vol. VI, No. 10, October 1939, p. 9.

Thirty-Third Report of the State Highway Commission to the Governor of Virginia, For the Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 1939, and Ending June 30, 1940. Richmond, Virginia: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1940.

Twenty-Ninth Report of the State Highway Commission to the Governor of Virginia, for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 1935, and Ending June 30, 1936. Richmond, Virginia: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1936.

“Virginia Highway Building.” *The Commonwealth*, Vol. VI, No. 10, October 1939, p. 41.

Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton. *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary*. Richmond, Virginia: New South Architectural Press, 1997.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated parcel are portrayed on the U.S.G.S. Richmond topographic map, and are defined as City of Richmond Parcel E0000153002.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated parcel include the historic office building and its entire original parcel. The adjacent Annex Building, built in 1961, is not included in the nominated parcel. There are no other contributing or non-contributing structures, buildings, or sites on the parcel.

¹ Richard Guy Wilson, Charles E. Brownell, William R. S. Rasmussen, and Calder C. Loth, *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Richmond, Virginia: The Virginia Museum, 1992), pp. 102, 390, 400. See also Charles Wilkins Short and Rudolph Stanley-Brown, *Public Buildings: Architecture Under the Public Works Administration, 1933-1939*, Volume 1 (originally published 1939: reprint edition, introduction by Richard Guy Wilson, New York, New York: Da Capo Press, 1986).

² The plans have a different inscription: "To perpetuate the comfort and safety. . ."

³ The Commission's first employees were Captain Philip St. Julien Wilson, Commissioner; George P. Coleman, Assistant Commissioner; and Dudley McDonald, Clerk. See Claree Sutton Mullen, "Virginia's Highways in Retrospect," *The Commonwealth*, Vol. VI, No. 10, October 1939, p. 9.

⁴ Initially, all but four counties relinquished responsibility. In 2003, only Arlington and Henrico counties retain responsibility for secondary roads.

⁵ *Twenty-Ninth Report of the State Highway Commission to the Governor of Virginia, for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 1935, and Ending June 30, 1936* (Richmond:, Virginia Division of Purchase and Printing, 1936), p. 13.

⁶ The 1886 Sanborn Fire Insurance map showed four three-story houses, nos. 1219, 1221, 1225, and 1227 E. Broad Street; also, an undertaker's wareroom building at 1915 E. Broad. The C.E. Belvin Lumber Yard was at the rear of these buildings, with several lumber sheds, a carpenter shop, open-air storage, and several tenements. By 1895, a fifth house, no. 1229 E. Broad Street, had been built, and the lumber yard was called the Carneal, Davis & Moore Lumber Yard. Mary Wingfield Scott, *Houses of Old Richmond* (Richmond, Virginia: The Valentine Museum, 1941), p. 109, identifies the houses as the homes of James Allen, of Capt. Joseph Myers, and of John Dooley. Ms. Scott records that they were in lamentable condition at the time of their demolition in 1937. The house at 1227 E. Broad is illustrated in Scott, fig. 98.

⁷ Carneal & Johnston, Architects and Engineers, were prominent in Richmond and Virginia, with over 1,334 commercial and public projects to their credit. The firm was called Carneal, Johnston & Wright during 1928-1945. See John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The Virginia Architects, 1835-1955: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond, Virginia: New South Architectural Press, 1997), pp. 67-75.

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⁸ *Thirty-Third Report of the State Highway Commission to the Governor of Virginia, For the Fiscal Year Beginning July 1, 1939, and Ending June 30, 1940* (Richmond, Virginia: Division of Purchase and Printing, 1940), p. 9.

⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁰ *Architectural Record*, December 1940, p. 16.